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Letter dated 23 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On instructions of my Government, I have the honour to forward the attached text of an address by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, to a national conference organized by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress on the status of the Lomé Peace Agreement delivered on 22 July 2000 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Ibrahim M. **Kamara**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 23 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Keynote address by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to the national conference on the Lomé Peace Agreement organized by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress

Freetown, 22 June 2000

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the wise decision taken by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, together with its partner, the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity (ACILS), to postpone this conference from May to June. The postponement was necessary because of what you rightly described as the "negative political developments in the country". That is, the flagrant violation of the Lomé Peace Agreement by the RUF, including the killing of peaceful demonstrators and the illegal detention of United Nations peacekeeping personnel.

Mr. Chairman, the events of May this year marked a turning point in the history of Sierra Leone. They brought into perspective the entire post-Lomé peace process. They also raised questions about the viability of the Lomé Peace Agreement. What, one may ask, are we supposed to do when one Party to the Agreement, namely the RUF, fails to abide by its commitment to the Agreement? How are we supposed to respond to continuing armed attacks, rapes, abductions, and other acts of terrorism by the RUF against the people of Sierra Leone? How are we supposed to react when the safety and security of our people are once again seriously threatened? What should be the reaction of the United Nations and its troop-contributing countries to the illegal detention of their peacekeepers by elements of the RUF? The actions of Mr. Foday Sankoh and some members of the RUF, especially those committed during the past few months, are tantamount to a revocation, on their part, of their commitment — that is if they had any at all — to the Lomé Peace Agreement. In other words, they are telling the world that as far as they are concerned the Lomé Agreement is meaningless. In the face of this new situation, how long should the Government and people of Sierra Leone allow Mr. Foday Sankoh and members of the RUF to maintain the benefits they derived from the provisions of the Lomé Peace Agreement? How long should they be allowed to hold the entire nation hostage while they continue to plunder our mineral resources not only to grease their war machines, but also to fill the pockets of their unscrupulous and greedy friends or partners in the West African subregion and beyond? How can anyone, in the current state of affairs, speak of a "negotiated settlement" with those who have gone all out to wreck the Lomé Peace Agreement through killings, rapes, hostage taking, and other serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law?

Let me turn now to the Lomé Peace Agreement itself, the subject of this conference. It is important to note that the Agreement is not just a conflict management document. It is, by letter and spirit, an instrument of conflict resolution. Notwithstanding its perceived weaknesses, the Lomé Peace Agreement was intended to pave the way for stability, national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Sierra Leone. On our part, that is the Government and people in whose name I signed it, the document was a solemn commitment to take some bold and

courageous steps to end the brutal conflict once and for all. This commitment is explicitly articulated in the Preamble to the Agreement. Among other things, we expressed our determination "to establish sustainable peace and security", we pledged forthwith "to settle all past, present and future differences and grievances by peaceful means", and "to refrain from the threat and use of armed force to bring about any change in Sierra Leone". This is a very important part of the document. It is as binding on the signatories, the Government and the RUF, as the other sections of the Agreement.

Having made that statement of principles, the document goes on to spell out in detail the specific actions to be taken in order to give effect to those principles. We have consistently maintained that the Agreement is a comprehensive document, and that it should be seen as a whole. It was not signed for the sole purpose of granting the RUF amnesty or for giving its members cabinet and other high-level posts. There are provisions for monitoring the ceasefire, and for establishing a permanent ceasefire; strengthening the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants; ensuring the establishment of a more professional and accountable armed force for the protection of the State; alleviating the plight of refugees and the internally displaced; establishment of mechanisms for national reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction; and the transformation of the rebel movement into a political party.

Let me remind you that the basis of the 1999 Lomé Agreement was in fact the 1996 Abidjan Accord. The question of amnesty or immunity for example, was not new. Article 15 of the 1996 Abidjan Accord stated, and I quote: "To consolidate the peace and promote the cause of national reconciliation, the Government of Sierra Leone shall ensure that no official or judicial action is taken against any member of the RUF/SL in respect of anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives as members of that organization up to the time of the signing of this Agreement ..." Unquote. In other words, three years later, Mr. Sankoh and the RUF were given a second chance, indeed a reprieve. By their actions since Lomé, Mr. Sankoh and many in the RUF leadership have trampled on that document. They have virtually torn the Lomé Peace Agreement. I can assure you that we are going to pick up the pieces.

Mr. Chairman, we have every reason to renounce our obligations under the Agreement and unilaterally declare them null and void. However, it would be irresponsible on our part to do so. In fact such a course of action would be detrimental to the safety and welfare of our people, and inconsistent with their desire, indeed their right to live in peace and security.

I would therefore take this opportunity to announce that while in principle we remain committed to the Lomé Peace Agreement, we reserve the right not to be bound by *all* its provisions. However, because it is an instrument for sustainable peace, and because it contains, generally speaking, strategies for achieving some of the principal objectives of our post-conflict programmes, we shall take a selective approach towards its implementation. From now on, we shall unilaterally, but carefully make our own assessment of the situation and determine which of the provisions are still valid, those that have been rendered obsolete by recent developments, and those that should, in the best interest of this nation be implemented.

We shall also set our own priorities. The security and humanitarian provisions of the Agreement will be our primary concern. For instance we attach special importance to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants — an activity which we had already launched long before the Lomé Peace Agreement, under the National Resettlement, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Programme (NRRRP). In this regard, we have left the door open for ex-combatants, especially those of the RUF, who want real peace, to come forward now and take advantage of the DDR programme before it is too late. Their safety is assured. I should add here that we shall faithfully abide by the relevant provisions in the document for national reconciliation.

Implementation of article XVII of the Agreement, namely, the provision on the restructuring and training of a truly loyal national armed force is also at the top of the agenda. At the same time, we shall continue to accord particular attention to the problem of child soldiers, and the need to mobilize international assistance for the proposed special fund for war victims.

Mr. Chairman, the Lomé Peace Agreement is not a perfect document. I must admit that there are provisions which, under other circumstances, we would not have accepted. However, we did what we had to do at that particular point in time, and without any apology. As I told the nation on the eve of the signing ceremony, the government delegation had participated in the peace talks in good faith. In response to the collective will of the majority of the people, the government delegation was determined to bring home a comprehensive agreement, one that would not only silence the guns of war temporarily, but would ensure lasting peace and security for all Sierra Leoneans. I should also point out that the Agreement was reached in the context of certain subregional, regional and international imperatives. In other words, while it was an agreement between the Government and the RUF, it had international implications. Some of these have manifested themselves in actions already taken or are now being contemplated by the international community, including the United Nations Security Council.

There was nothing really wrong with the Lomé Peace Agreement, per se. The problem was the lack of commitment on the part of Mr. Foday Sankoh and some members of the RUF leadership to fulfil their obligations under the Agreement. This is the crux of the matter. This conference may wish to examine in depth the implications of the serious violations of the Agreement by the RUF. As active members of civil society, I look forward to hearing your views on this important issue.

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your deliberations.